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Reports relating to programme and administrative oversight and evaluation

Report on policy development and evaluation

Report of the High Commissioner

Summary

This report, covering the period from July 2014 through June 2015, is provided pursuant to the decision of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme to consider reports relating to programme and administrative oversight and evaluation during its annual plenary session (A/AC.96/1003, para. 25. 1. (f) (vi)).

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I. Introduction

1. UNHCR is committed to ensuring the systematic evaluation and assessment of its policies, programmes, projects, partnerships and practices. At the policy level, responsibility for these functions resides in the Policy Development and Evaluation Service (PDES), working in cooperation with relevant divisions and bureaux.

2. During the period under review, the Office continued to reform its evaluation policy to bring it more into conformity with the standards set by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG). UNHCR has placed particular emphasis on developing evaluation tools and procedures adapted to the often volatile circumstances in which the Office works, as well as on developing methodologies to evaluate the different aspects of UNHCR's protection activities. Through PDES, the Office also facilitated research on relevant issues and encouraged an active exchange of ideas and analysis between UNHCR and its partners. All of these activities were undertaken with the purpose of strengthening UNHCR's ability to fulfil its mandate in an effective and efficient manner.[1]

II. Evaluation policy, capacity and staffing

3. A revised evaluation policy framework, outlining the responsibilities for evaluation across the organization and establishing criteria for the inclusion of programme evaluations in the annual work plan, will be presented to the High Commissioner for final approval in the second half of 2015. Its goal is to ensure that UNHCR's evaluation work is able to address: (i) the scale and complexity of the organization's global responsibilities in the face of changing geo-politics and mega-trends; (ii) the continuing and contemporary challenges of forced displacement, refugee protection and solutions; and (iii) the associated need for operational insights, learning and accountability to match the substantial increase in UNHCR's resources and activities. The revised evaluation policy framework will apply to UNHCR's mandated responsibilities for refugee protection, assistance and the pursuit of solutions; statelessness; and its contributions to the protection and assistance of internally displaced persons (IDPs) within the agreed inter-agency framework.

4. The revised evaluation policy framework will address the key points contained in the review of UNHCR's evaluation capacity conducted by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) in 2012 and 2013.[2] It has also been informed by the methodologies, procedures and tools for evaluations that have been developed during the reporting period. It is foreseen that a decentralized evaluation function will be established, taking into account the wide range of situations and contexts in which the Office pursues its mandate. Implementation will first prioritize cooperation between headquarters divisions and bureaus, followed by field operations. These investments have already generated an increase in demand for joint evaluation initiatives, as well as for technical support and guidance in undertaking evaluations from both headquarters and the field.

5. Some progress was made towards strengthening the Office's overall evaluation capacity through increased cooperation on evaluation work between headquarters divisions and bureaux, and with field operations. PDES retained primary responsibility for the development of: evaluation policies in line with international best practices; global and

[1] Unless otherwise indicated, evaluations, reviews and research papers referenced in this document may be accessed at: www.unhcr.org/pages/4a1d28526.html.

[2] Document number E/AC.51/2013/5, available at: https://oios.un.org/.

strategic level evaluation work; quality assurance; refining methodologies, procedures and tools; technical support and capacity building; and dissemination of knowledge, findings and insights from evaluation work.

6. Investment in staff training in evaluation work continued throughout the reporting period. The deployment of a new staff member recruited under the High Commissioner's Capacity Building Initiative is now expected in the last quarter of 2015. It is foreseen that this post will primarily be devoted to supporting the development of decentralized evaluation work at field level through the preparation of training materials and the convening of workshops.

III. Evaluations and reviews

7. During the reporting period, UNHCR undertook a range of evaluations and reviews of policy and programmatic issues relating to emergency response, protection and durable solutions. Increasingly, these evaluations and reviews have made use of independent external expertise. There has been increased investment in quality assurance work with respect to the design of terms of reference, assessment of evidence strength and the review processes for the draft and final reports. UNHCR has also created a "Management response matrix", which requires managers to provide a formal response to the findings of each evaluation and which was designed to fortify the learning and accountability objectives of the evaluation function.

8. In the context of emergency operations, and in line with its internal commitment to assess its response to level-3 emergencies, the Office completed an independent evaluation of its work in Jordan and Lebanon for refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic. UNHCR also undertook evaluations of its response in Cameroon and Chad relating to the crisis in the Central African Republic; and in Ethiopia and Uganda relating to the situation in South Sudan. A key focus of these evaluations was to assess the quality of the impact and UNHCR's performance in coordinating the overall response. In general, the findings were positive, particularly in the light of the fact that UNHCR was required to respond to simultaneous emergencies that unfolded and evolved over the course of the reporting period. These evaluations also provided an opportunity to refine existing approaches to assessing the quality of UNHCR's protection interventions. Some weaknesses were identified in relation to contingency planning and preparedness, site selection, medium-term planning and organization and information management.

9. Following a comprehensive review of UNHCR's role in assisting States with the assumption of responsibility for refugee status determination (RSD), an evaluation of UNHCR's RSD programme in Kenya was released in April 2015. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the progress of the joint plan devised by UNHCR and the Kenyan authorities to transition to nationally-led and managed asylum processes and institutions. The evaluation found evidence of tangible progress, although indicated that the timeline for the transition should be adjusted. It recommended further investments, in particular in legal processes and safeguards, and that national administrative responsibilities be prioritized and clarified. An important outcome of the evaluation was the development of a user-friendly checklist to guide operations through the key steps required for transition to national asylum systems. UNHCR also completed an evaluation of its programmes to combat xenophobia in South Africa, as well as of the strength of the current UNHCR guidelines on addressing xenophobia. It found that there was room for improvement in both areas and recommended that UNHCR revise its policy guidance on combatting xenophobia for field operations.

10. Following a previous assessment of UNHCR's use of the Central Emergency Reserve Fund (CERF), an evaluation of UNHCR's engagement with the "Delivering As One" (DaO) initiative of the United Nations was completed in early 2015. The evaluation found that there had been modest returns on UNHCR's investment in the DaO process since its inception. It noted some difficulties in adjusting UNHCR's annual planning and reporting cycle to the longer-term requirements and the different results framework operated by DaO.

IV. Research and publications

11. UNHCR continued to support independent research through the "New Issues in Refugee Research" series. Five papers were published during the reporting period on: the rights of displaced Iraqi children in Jordan; a socio-economic review of Japan's resettlement programme; changes to the Croatian asylum system following its accession to the European Union; forced migration and the Myanmar peace process; and the role of religious organizations and institutions in supporting refugee protection. UNHCR also undertook research in conjunction with the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit on the migration of unaccompanied children to Europe, and published a discussion paper on UNHCR's use of incentive payments to refugees.

12. In cooperation with the World Bank's Global Poverty Practice Unit, UNHCR contributed to the design and preparation of a major analytical study of the Syrian refugee population in Jordan and Lebanon during 2014 and 2015. Combining UNHCR's extensive field-generated data with the World Bank's expertise in econometric modelling, the study will provide the first comprehensive analysis of the poverty and welfare of one of the world's largest refugee populations. It is anticipated that the findings will support more cost-effective targeting, inform medium-term planning in key sectors and provide a good evidence base for future policy decisions by governments, donors and humanitarian and development assistance actors.

13. UNHCR also participated in the design and commissioning of a series of studies that will analyse the economic impact of refugee populations on their host communities. It is anticipated that these studies will commence in the last quarter of 2015 and continue throughout 2016. The primary objective is to generate a sound evidence base that will fill gaps in current knowledge about the costs and benefits to local economies and communities of hosting refugee populations.

V. Other activities

14. In 2015, PDES supported the continued implementation of UNHCR's 2009 urban refugee policy through the coordination of the "Building communities of practice for urban refugees" project. This project has included a series of regional interagency workshops and roundtable events in key cities hosting urban refugees, attended by government officials, civil society representatives and partners. UNHCR is compiling the good practices shared during the workshops and the recommendations emanating from the roundtables in a series of reports that will highlight successful activities for providing protection and services to urban refugees, as well key challenges. UNHCR also continued to manage the interactive website, www.urbangoodpractices.org. This is a repository for tools and guidelines, research and multi-media resources on urban refugees, as well as a platform for online modules of the Urban Refugee Learning Programme, which is being translated into Spanish and Arabic.

VI. External relations and inter-agency evaluations

15. As focal point for external and inter-agency reviews and evaluations, PDES coordinated the OIOS evaluation of UNHCR's programmes on durable solutions for refugees.[3] PDES functioned as the liaison for all stakeholders, both internal and external to UNHCR, and acted as the focal point for logistics. UNHCR attended the formal presentation of the OIOS evaluation and responded to questions put by the members of the Committee for Programme Coordination in New York. Additional liaison activities included steering the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) review of UNHCR through to its conclusion in early 2015.

16. UNHCR participated in the annual meetings of the UNEG and in a number of related working groups. Of particular relevance was the steering group of the inter-agency humanitarian evaluation (IAHE), established under the auspices of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, as well as the management groups for the inter-agency evaluations of the Central African Republic and South Sudan level-3 emergencies, to which UNHCR contributed financial support. These evaluations were of interest to UNHCR with respect to both the technical and methodological challenges of evaluating collective responses to large-scale emergencies, as well as to assessing UNHCR's responsibilities under the cluster system. They were also complementary to UNHCR's own evaluations of level-3 emergencies in the adjacent countries (see above, para. 8).

[3] Available at: http://www.unhcr.org/5568170d9.html.